

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05
MCT-01 IO-13 DHA-02 EUR-12 SCS-03 SCA-01 AID-05
/095 W

-----024172 011406Z /43

O 011334Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4717

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 4087

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS SU ET

SUBJECT: REPORT OF SUDANESE SEIZURE OF ETHIOPIAN TOWN

REF A. STATE 152857 B. OSLO 3081

1. EMBASSY RECEIVED FIRST REPORTS OF BEGI INCIDENT FROM AMERICAN MISSIONARY SOURCES STATIONED IN ASOSA, SOME 50 MILES NORTH OF BEGI, TO EFFECT THAT BEGI HAD BEEN OCCUPIED JUNE 27 BY "HOSTILE ELEMENTS", WHICH APPARENTLY HAD COME OVER BORDER FROM SUDAN. MISSIONARY IN ASOSA WAS CONCERNED FOR HIS FAMILY'S SAFETY BECAUSE OF ADDITIONAL REPORTS THAT OCCUPYING FORCE INTENDED TO MOVE NORHT TOWARDS BOMBASHI, WHICH HAVE CUT ROAD FROM ASOSA TO ADDIS ABABA.

2. WHILE THERE WAS NO HARD INFORMATION AS TO IDENTITY OF OCCUPYING FORCE, MISSIONARIES FIRST ASSUMED THAT EDU INVOLVED. LATER, HOWEVER, EMBASSY LEARNED THAT NORWEIGIAN MISSIONARY NEAR BEGI HAD RADIOED TO HIS PARENT ORGANIZATION IN ADDIS THAT "UNIFORMED TROOPS FROM SUDAN" HAD
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ENTERED HIS MISSION JUNE 28, TOLD HIM HE WOULD NOT BE HARMED IF HE AND HIS FAMILY STAYED PUT, APPROPRIATED TWO TRUCKS WHICH HAVE SINCE BEEN RETURNED, AND GAVE SOME INDICATION THAT THEY PLANNED TO MOVE ON BOMBASHI. MISSIONARY ALSO REPORTED HEAVY FIRING COMING FROM DIRECTION OF BEGI MORNING OF JUNE 28.

3. TROOPS APPARENTLY DID NOT SAY THEY WERE SUDANESE, MAY NOT EVEN HAVE SPOKEN ARABIC, BUT NORWEGIAN MAY HAVE ASSUMED THEY WERE SUDANESE BECAUSE THEY WERE IN UNIFORM. IT IS PRESUMABLY THIS MISSIONARY'S REPORT WHICH HAS PROMPTED REUTER'S STORY AND OTHER PRESS ACCOUNTS. WE HAVE RECEIVED NO CONFIRMATION OF INCIDENT FROM ETHIOPIAN SOURCES, BUT ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT BEGI WAS INDEED AT LEAST TEMPORARILY IN HOSTILE HANDS. NORWEGIAN MISSION ADDIS HAS SINCE LEARNED THAT LOCAL ETHIOPIAN PEASANTS' ASSOCIATION MAY HAVE MEANWHILE REGAINED CONTROL OF TOWN. IN ANY EVENT WE CONSIDER IT EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT SUDANESE WERE DIRECTLY INVOLVED.

4. THERE ARE NO ETHIOPIAN ARMY UNITS IN WESTERN WOLLEGA REGION, AND TOWNS ARE DEFENDED ONLY BY POLICE AND LOCALLY RECRUITED MILITIA, SINCE REGION HAS BEEN ONE OF QUIETEST IN ETHIOPIA FOR SOME TIME. NORWEGIAN MISSION NEVERTHELESS HAS BEGUN PULLING ALL OF ITS EIGHT MISSIONARIES OUT OF ETHIOPIA FOR SECURITY REASONS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARAMILITARY FORCES, ALLEGATIONS, BORDER INCIDENTS, INVASIONS
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ADDIS04087
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770235-0683
Format: TEL
From: ADDIS ABABA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197707100/aaaadizu.tel
Line Count: 82
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 152857
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1723781
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REPORT OF SUDANESE SEIZURE OF ETHIOPIAN TOWN
TAGS: MOPS, PBOR, SU, ET
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9efd8662-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009